

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PC-01 AID-05 IGA-02 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 SP-02 MMO-01 /029 W

-----028588 290815Z /14

R 281400Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0305

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FOR AF/W FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, DM, US

SUBJ: PEACE CORPS IN BENIN

REF: STATE 304898

1. WHETHER OR NOT THE PEACE CORPS SHOULD REMAIN IN BENIN HAS BEEN A QUESTION UNDER DISCUSSION FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS. IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS WE HAVE HAD VISITS FROM THREE SENIOR PEACE CORPS OFFICIALS (ACTING AFRICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR HUNTER, GENERAL COUNSEL MACLEAN, AND NEW AFRICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR GAYMON), EACH OF WHOM CANVASSED VOLUNTEERS, MET WITH EMBASSY AND GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) OFFICIALS, AND MADE FIRST HAND INVESTIGATION OF PC PROBLEMS IN BENIN. YET THE QUESTION STILL REMAINS WITHOUT A DEFINITE ANSWER.

2. THE GPRB OFFICIALLY IS VERY MUCH IN FAVOR OF A PC PRESENCE IN BENIN: IN FACT, IT WOULD PROBABLY VIEW ANY MAJOR PHASE OUT OF THE PROGRAM AS AN ACTION INTENDED TO SLIGHT BENIN. EVEN INTERIOR MINISTER AZONHIHO, THE MOST OUTSPOKENLY ANTI-WESTERN FIGURE IN THE GOVERNMENT, TOLD PC DIRECTOR PASELA THAT HE

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VERY MUCH APPRECIATED THE WORK DONE BY THE VOLUNTEERS. STRESSING THAT VOLUNTEERS WERE NOT UNDER SUSPICION AS FOREIGN AGENTS, AZONHIHO STATED BLUNTLY THAT IF GPRB HAD NOT APPRECIATED ROLE OF PC, IT WOULD HAVE EXPELLED THE VOLUNTEERS LONG AGO. DESPITE THESE ASSURANCES, A MAJORITY OF VOLUNTEERS STILL HAS SERIOUS RESERVATIONS AS TO WHETHER THERE IS A USEFUL ROLE THAT THE PC CAN PLAY IN THE PRESENT POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

3. PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THAT VOLUNTEER MORALE VARIES GREATLY ACCORDING TO GPRB ERRATIC ACTIONS. THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IS CHARACTERIZED BY ALTERNATING PERIODS OF TENSION AND DETENTE, OF GREAT REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY -- WHICH MEANS DENUNCIATION OF "CAPITALIST, IMPERIALIST" COUNTRIES -- OR OF NEARLY TOTAL GPRB SILENCE AS IT RETREATS TO PLAN ITS NEXT MOVE. IN MOMENTS OF REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL, VOLUNTEERS FEEL THAT IT IS NOT WORTH HAVING A PC PROGRAM; DURING MOMENTS OF DETENTE, THEY HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS, AND ARE INCLINED TO RECOMMEND CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRAM.

4. A CRITICAL ELEMENT AFFECTING VOLUNTEER AND STAFF THINKING IS THE UNCERTAINTY OF WHAT IDEOLOGIES IN THE POLITICAL BUREAU WILL PERSUADE THE GOVERNMENT TO DO NEXT. THERE IS ALWAYS THE FEAR THAT ANY EFFORT EXPENDED MAY PROVE TO BE WASTED IF THERE IS A RADICAL CHANGE IN POLICY. THE MOST OBVIOUS EXAMPLE OF THIS UNCERTAINTY IS THE TIMING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR. IN 1976 PC PROGRAMMING WAS SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY THE GPRB'S DECISION TO CHANGE THE ACADEMIC YEAR TO RUN FROM FEBRUARY TO DECEMBER INSTEAD OF FROM SEPTEMBER TO JULY. VOLUNTEERS LEFT IDLE FOR SIX MONTHS WERE FRUSTRATED AND FELT THAT THEY WERE WASTING VALUABLE TIME. NOW THERE ARE RUMORS THAT THE EDUCATIONAL YEAR MAY BE SHIFTED BACK TO THE OLD SCHEDULE IN FEBRUARY -- A SITUATION THAT WOULD AGAIN LEAVE THOSE VOLUNTEERS IN TEACHING (14 OUT OF 20) IDLE FOR SIX MONTHS. THE GPRB DENIES THAT A CHANGE IS FORTH-

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COMING, BUT THIS MEANS LITTLE SINCE IT ALSO DENIED THAT IT WOULD MAKE THE CHANGE IN 1976. IN THIS SORT OF ATMOSPHERE IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT PC IS HAVING DIFFICULTY IN DECIDING WHETHER OR AT WHAT LEVEL TO STAY IN BENIN.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PC-01 AID-05 IGA-02 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 SP-02 MMO-01 /029 W

-----028514 290815Z /20

R 281300Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0306

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FOR AF/W FROM CHARGE

4. WHILE THE DECISION TO STAY OR PHASE OUT MUST BE ULTIMATELY MADE BY PC WASHINGTON ACCORDING TO ITW OWN PROFESSIONAL CRITERIA, OUR FEELING IS THAT THE PC SHOULD DEFINITELY CONTINUE IN BENIN. VOLUNTEERS SHOULD ONLY WORK, HOWEVER, IN PROJECTS RECOGNIZED AS USEFUL BY THE VOLUNTEERS THEMSELVES, BY THE GPRB, AND BY PEACE CORPS/WASHINGTON. AT THE PRESENT TIME THERE ARE TWENTY VOLUNTEERS IN BENIN; THREE HEALTH VOLUNTEERS, TWO ARCHITECTS, AN ENVIRONMENTAL BIOLOGIST IN THE GAME PARK, AND FOURTEEN TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. OF THESE THE MOST EFFECTIVE ARE THE ARCHITECTS, WHO HAVE MORE WORK THAN THEY CAN PERFORM, THE GAME PARK VOLUNTEER, WHO IS EXTRA-ORDINARILY DEDICATED, AND A HANDFUL OF ENGLISH TEACHERS WHO ARE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THEIR DUTIES WITHOUT EXCESSIVE IDEOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. THE REMAINDER FIND THAT THE FRUSTRATIONS OF COPING WITH THE UNCERTAINTY AND IDEOLOGY OUTWEIGH ANY POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THEIR SERVICE BOTH IN TERMS OF THE EXPERIENCE THEY DERIVE FROM BEING IN BENIN AND OF THE CONTRIBUTION THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO MAKE TO THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT.

6. CONSEQUENTLY WE RECOMMEND THAT THE SIZE OF THE PC PRESENCE IN BENIN BE DETERMINED BY EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FUNCTION BEING PERFORMED BY THE VOLUNTEER. IN PRACTICAL TERMS THIS PROBABLY WOULD MEAN ELIMINATING HEALTH EDUCATION AS A VOLUNTEER

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ACTIVITY AND TAILORING THE ENGLISH TEACHING PROGRAM TO AREAS WHERE IT IS LIKELY TO BE MOST PRODUCTIVE. VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE SELECTED FOR ARCHITECTURE, GAME PARK AND SIMILAR PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS WHERE ACHIEVEMENTS CAN BE MEASURED IN MORE VISIBLE TERMS. SIMILARLY PC SHOULD EXPLORE POSSIBILITY OF STARTING AN ANIMAL TRACTION PROGRAM IN SOUTH CENTRAL BENIN, PARTICULARLY IN THE ZOU REGION. THE ANIMAL TRACTION PROGRAM IN AHT ATACORA IS ONE OF PEACE CORPS' GREATEST SUCCESSES, AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT SIMILAR TECHNIQUES WOULD SUCCEED IN THE ZOU. WHILE RENEWED PC PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS MAY RAISE POLITICAL OBJECTIONS -- AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS BECOMING THE PRESERVE OF NORTH KOREA, CHINA AND OTHER "FRIDNELY" COUNTRIES -- THE POSSIBILITY COULD CERTAINLY BE EXPLORED WITH THE GPRB.

7. PC DIRECTOR PASELA, WHO HAS READ THIS MESSAGE, FEELS THAT WHILE VOLUNTEERS GAIN A CERTAIN CROSS CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN

BENIN, FROM A STRICTLY PROFESSIONAL POINT OF VIEW, THOSE VOLUNTEERS SERVING HERE ARE NOT RECEIVING THE TOTAL VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE THEY DESERVE. THIS IS A PROFESSIONAL OPINION WHICH THE REST OF US ON THE COUNTRY TEAM ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO JUDGE. PASELA WILL DISCUSS THIS FURTHER WITH DR. GAYMON NEXT WEEK. THE REST OF US ON THE COUNTRY TEAM, HOWEVER, LOOKING AT LONG-TERM U.S. INTERESTS IN ABICA, FEEL THAT THE PC SHOULD STAY IN BENIN ON TERMS MUTUALLY AGREEABLE TO PC/WASHINGTON AND THE GPRB. THOMPSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROGRAM ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COTON001947
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780001-0270
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From: COTONOU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 304898
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13-Apr-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 123015
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PEACE CORPS IN BENIN
TAGS: EAID, DM, US, PC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f4025efc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009